Overview

The Counseling Psychology faculty at West Virginia University approved the adoption of a competency-based evaluation model at its September 13, 2010 meeting. The American Psychological Association (APA) encouraged and supported our adoption of this approach in its re-accreditation letter of August 5, 2010.

In that letter, under Domain F: Program Self-Assessment and Quality Enhancement, the APA reminded us that the US Department of Education requires that, “…programs assess student achievement through outcome data on trainees while in the program and after program completion (APA, 2010, p. 5). For trainees within the program, we chose to design our evaluation method using the Competency Benchmarks in Professional Psychology document that was recently approved by the APA’s Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) and the Council of Chairs of Training Councils (CCTC) in professional psychology.

Competency Benchmarks Document

While work to create the current document can be traced to October of 2006 when the final report of the APA’s Task Force on the Assessment of Competence in Professional Psychology was submitted, the search for a viable and universal training model for the profession can be seen to emerge in the mid-1940s with the creation of the APA itself and the nearly legendary Boulder Conference of 1949 and the subsequent Vail Conference of 1973. There have been numerous attempts to develop, disseminate, and adopt a profession-wide training model in the intervening years, and even the provisions of the Boulder and Vail Models have come under scrutiny and criticism. That “one size does not seem to fit all” has been the cry of various constituencies in professional psychology for over 50 years now. However, with the increasing demand for accountability in delivering health care services, the training models used to prepare the providers of those services has come into much sharper focus in the last decade.

The Benchmarks Competency document can be seen, then, as the latest attempt to come to a consensus on what training in professional psychology should be. Working drafts of the document were circulated in 2004, 2007, and in 2009 a draft was placed on the APA website which seemed to suggest the time had come to adopt its premises, definitions, and ideology. The full citation given in 2009, from the APA website is:


The latest reworking of the document is dated March 2011 and as noted above, was approved by the BEA and the CCTC for dissemination. It is not a binding document, but can now be used with some sense that it represents the most current thinking regarding training health service providers in
professional psychology. The APA has asked our program to forward our student/trainee evaluation model by September 1, 2011 therefore the currently available forms have been used as a template for that task.

**Evaluating Competencies in Professional Psychology**

The benchmarks document focuses on three levels of trainee competency, (1) *readiness for practicum*, (2) *readiness for internship*, and (3) *readiness for entry to practice*. Based on the program of study currently in place at WVU in Counseling Psychology it seems reasonable to think we should evaluate trainees at the end of the first year in the program, prior to their beginning practicum that summer or fall, again at the end of the 2nd or 3rd year as they prepare to apply for the pre-doctoral internship match, and again following the final defense of the dissertation as that is that last point in the program of study over which we have any jurisdiction. Furthermore it would signal that the faculty believes the trainees are competent to enter into the practice arena in a manner consistent with the program’s goals and objectives and as defined by whatever state licensing body is relevant to their career plans.

Therefore three versions of the benchmarks document have been developed reflecting the competencies outlined and behaviorally anchored for each of the timeframes defined by the document as described above. There are 16 competency domains, each with at least one, and sometimes up to five items representing finer components and more specific attributes and behaviors that make up the larger domain. The specific data sources for each competency are described and provided on the relevant form.

Actually two forms of the March 2011 document have been provided to date, one in which a brief descriptor of the competency is provided, and a second, longer document in which more specific behavioral anchors are provided for each competency. On the forms we are using a narrative component is also included for each general domain in which the faculty and supervisors may add comments or provide recommendations. Students will also be required to submit specific portfolio items, detailed below, to be reviewed by faculty, as part of the evaluation process for each time period.

Each student will be evaluated by the faculty under the oversight of the training director who will sign the evaluation form. Either the student’s advisor or the training director will be responsible for meeting each trainee to go over the evaluation. The trainee will also sign to indicate the information in the evaluation was conveyed appropriately. In the instance wherein a trainee feels some element or elements of the evaluation were inaccurate, the standard appeal and/or grievance procedures will apply as outlined in the Counseling Student Doctoral Handbook.

The metric suggested by the document developers for evaluating the benchmarks is a frequency scalar and is shown below:

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**Readiness for Practicum**

This evaluation should occur sometime during Spring semester of the 1st year; by April 1. All the benchmarks comprising the level of trainee readiness are within the purview of the core faculty based on
classroom behavior, performance, and achievement. In addition some elements will be observed more informally via interpersonal interactions and advising meetings.

For this evaluation period the student must receive an average score of 2.0 or better across all domains in order to be recommended for practicum training. Individual items/competencies not meeting this standard will be addressed with each student by the faculty as needed and any necessary remediation plans developed and put into place.

**Readiness for Internship**

This evaluation should occur after the successful completion of the comprehensive doctoral examinations and prior to the student submitting the APPIC application materials for the internship year in which they hope to match. This will occur either at the beginning of Fall semester of the 3rd year, or the 4th year if a particular student has either failed to match and/or decided to take a year prior to internship to complete the dissertation. Other time frames are possible if the comprehensive examinations should take place in January.

The faculty will consider a range of items for this review period that will include many of the same issues that comprised the previous evaluation readiness for practicum, but will also necessarily include performance on the comprehensive examinations. In determining a student’s readiness for internship, the evaluations on file from the various on-site practicum supervisors and input from the classroom practicum instructors will, of course, play a central and highly significant role.

As with the previous evaluation, students will be asked to submit specific portfolio items to the faculty for review. At this level the expectations are considerably higher within each domain, and many new areas come under review. Therefore the same scoring rubric of “usually” will be required in order to demonstrate that an acceptable level of competency has been attained.

Thus on this evaluation the student must receive an average score of 2.0 or better across all domains in order to be recommended for internship. Individual items/competencies not meeting this standard will be addressed with each student by the faculty as needed and any necessary remediation plans developed and put into place.

**Readiness for Practice/Final Evaluation**

At this point in the candidate’s training, the program will have made its final contribution to the student’s professional development. The final evaluation serves as a summative document that attests to the new graduate’s readiness to enter into the practice field as a post-doctoral fellow, supervised psychologist, or licensure candidate, depending on the statues of the relevant practice jurisdiction and the candidate’s professional aspirations.

Several new sources of data are utilized for this final evaluation period—the approved draft of dissertation, notes from the dissertation defense, the final evaluation from the student’s internship training director and/or clinical supervisors; and any conference materials or publications.

The competencies at this juncture are defined and anchored by considerably higher expectations as befits career entry into professional practice leading to licensure, perhaps within a few months of graduation, again depending on the licensure statutes of a particular state or jurisdiction. Therefore the average across all domains on the final, summative evaluation should equal 3.0 or better; “almost
always”. We feel that requiring this advanced level of competency helps to safeguard the potential consumer of psychological services and to protect the public from inappropriate or substandard services.

Obviously, this document cannot serve a gatekeeper function for completion since the requirements for graduation cannot extend beyond the approved course of study for the doctoral degree culminating in a successful final defense of the dissertation research. However, the final evaluation document can serve as a source of pertinent and critical information for a licensure board, post-doctoral fellowship committee, or future employer.

In order for the document to be released, however, the graduate would need to consent to such use of his or her educational records. Even in the instance where the document were not released to a third party, the information contained therein could serve as a frame of reference to respond to legitimate and authorized requests for information on our graduates, within the limitations of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

**Competencies and support documentation.**

For completeness’ sake, some items are identical among the domains, but they are included again to clarify the evaluative source for each domain.

**Readiness for practicum.**
- I: None—this domain is evaluated by the faculty based on its observations
- II: Self-as-instrument papers from CPSY 760 & 701
- III: Ethics paper from CPSY 780
- IV: Self-as-instrument papers CPSY 760 & 701
- VII: Scored protocols and written reports from CPSY 769, 764 & 769
- VIII: Papers from CPSY 701, 763
- X: “Dissertation Prelim” paper from CPSY 760
- XV: Signed supervisor logs from CPSY 782
- XVI: Self-as-instrument papers; Ethics paper from CPSY 780

**Readiness for Internship.** Supervisors’ evaluations are those from the student’s various practicum rotations and submitted to the on-campus practicum instructor.
- I: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
- II: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum; Self-as-instrument paper from first practicum class; APPIC Essay #3
- III: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
- IV: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
- V: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
- VI: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum; case write-ups from CPSY 770
- VII: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum; case write-ups from CPSY 770
- VIII: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum; case write-ups from CPSY 770
- IX: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum; case write-ups from CPSY 770
- X: Dissertation proposal
- XI: Dissertation proposal
• XVII: Faculty teaching supervisor evaluation
• XVIII: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum

Two new sources of data are utilized for this final evaluation period—the Dissertation and the final evaluation from the student’s internship training director and/or clinical supervisors. These are designated as D and I, respectively on the evaluation form.

• XIV: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
• XIV: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
• XV: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum
• XVI: Supervisors’ evaluations from practicum; case write-ups from CPSY 770

Readiness for Practice/Final. Materials for this portfolio submission are more individualized than for the previous two time periods.

• Final internship evaluation. Please note that you may need to sign a release of information form in order for your internship director to forward the evaluation document to us.
  o If your internship program doesn’t use a comprehensive form, similar to what is used at the Carruth Center, it may be necessary for you to provide one to your supervisors or the DCT. We must have a comprehensive evaluation of the training objectives achieved during internship in order to complete this final evaluation form. We can provide one for you if necessary.
• Final draft of the dissertation
• Comments from the dissertation chair on the final defense
• Evaluations from any supervisors in the field on your teaching, outreach, or clinical work
• Materials from any conference presentations
• Copies of any manuscripts submitted for publication and acceptances/reprints in available
• Other materials you feel would assist the faculty in evaluating your competencies in the various domains for this final time period.